

Night Windows:
Portraits of Loneliness in the Frames of Edward Hopper and Film Noir

An Honors Thesis

By

Anthony Miglieri

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Richard Edwards

Ball State University
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Abstract

Loneliness is a common state of feeling as recognizable as any other. Painter Edward Hopper explores the theme of loneliness in the vast majority of his works, pinpointing especially the effect of urbanization and other phenomena that took root in the early to mid-twentieth century in America. Similarly, the cinematic genre film noir has offered countless portraits of loneliness in and around the city, although focusing more on overt violence and sex than does Hopper. The following project is an exploration of the theme of loneliness through the images of isolated individuals in Edward Hopper's paintings and films noir in order to explain the rise of alienation in early to mid-twentieth century America.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Richard Edwards for advising me through this project. Had he not so graciously offered me his knowledge about writing (especially in such a long form), film noir, and Edward Hopper, I would have struggled mightily to complete this project. He has been one of my most cherished mentors during my college experience.

I also need to thank my mom, my dad, Matthew, Josh, and Emma for always providing me emotional support and strength as I battled this behemoth of a paper.

Process Analysis Statement

My idea for this project was born from my love of Edward Hopper's paintings. Ever since I tried to recreate *Nighthawks* (1942) for an art class in middle school, I have been fascinated by Hopper's scenes of lonely people lost in America. In this project, I wanted to learn why these paintings so entrance me. Similarly, the other main subject of my project, film noir, sprang from my lifelong love of film. Since I began studying older films in my teen years, I have been struck by the existential, lonely nature of films noir. Hopper's paintings and film noir seemed a perfect match, so my project dissects the commonalities (and a few differences) between the portraits of loneliness depicted by them both. As an English major with minors in screenwriting and graphic arts, this written endeavor proved to be an ideal blend of my academic studies as well.

For my research on this project, I used four main types of sources: books, online articles, paintings, and films. I mainly used books for the fact-based introduction to Hopper and his career. I also found in Hopper biographies a number of quotes that I inserted into my paper in order to illuminate certain points. In the online articles, I found information on early to mid-twentieth century America to support the points I wanted to make about Hopper's paintings. For instance, in the section on *Automat* (1927), I included research-based facts about automat restaurants and built my argument with the aid of this information. Since it was impossible for me to view Hopper's real work for the section on his paintings, I used the highest quality digital reproductions I could find online so that my analyses could be as accurate to the real paintings as possible. I also added several images of the paintings throughout the paper so that the reader can see the images' details as I discuss them in the text. Finally, I

viewed films and film clips for the film noir section of the project. Although I was already quite familiar with most of the films I chose to analyze, re-watching the films and specific scenes was imperative for me to make detailed arguments about them. Like with the paintings, I have also added film stills to the body of my project's text.

I did encounter a few challenges during the process of completing this project. From the beginning, I had to adjust to writing such a lengthy piece. My advisor, Dr. Richard Edwards, helped me immensely in this respect, teaching me how to divide the work up to avoid being overwhelmed or confused. I learned that this method of writing in specific page increments is a viable method for me to write longer pieces such as this. Dr. Edwards also helped me through another difficult point early in the process: when we realized that I was writing in a slightly different direction than we had originally planned, he helped me clarify my thesis and get back on track. I admit I experienced some moments of serious doubt about my abilities to complete the project. However, my main takeaway about myself is that I am capable of producing such a long piece of writing. Although the process was been arduous at times, I believe I have emerged as a more complete and confident writer. I am proud to have created an original, complete work about Edward Hopper and film noir—topics I love.

INTRODUCTION

Thesis

Edward Hopper knew loneliness. His wife, Jo Hopper, once tried to explain to an interviewer why no one would ever be able to write a true biography on him: "You'll never get the whole story. It's pure Dostoevsky. Oh, the shattering bitterness!" (qtd. in Levin, *Intimate* xi). Whether her voice was laced with humor or not, Jo Hopper's invocation of Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky offers a glimpse into just how isolated the painter must have felt at times. However, we do not need to draw parallels between Edward Hopper and isolated Dostoevsky characters like the narrator in *Notes from Underground* (1864) in order to understand the sense of urban alienation that the painter absorbed. It's all on display in Hopper's work, in his portraits of loneliness.

In his paintings, Hopper observed the acute alienation of the city, a venue that expanded wildly in the early to mid-twentieth century in America. In solitary characters trapped within modern scenes of the city, Hopper studied the quiet, the contemplation, the unknowability of lonely moments. He even found loneliness in the new act of moviegoing. His relationship with the cinema was long and varied: before he became famous as an original painter, he was paid to watch silent films and create posters for them (Levin, *Intimate* 212). "Jo and I go to the movies a lot," Edward Hopper said near the end of his career, listing recent viewings of films like Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1957), which he called "a good satire on modern technology" (Levin, *Intimate* 555). Besides gaining inspiration from films like *Mon Oncle*, Hopper also influenced many films, especially in the genre of film noir. Birthed in the early 1940s, film noir portrays

onscreen an urban loneliness similar to Hopper's. But where Hopper's still paintings leave the beginnings and endings to interpretation, film noir outright portrays the sex and violence lurking on the periphery.

In the following project, I explore the theme of loneliness through the artifacts of Edward Hopper's paintings and films noir in order to explain early to mid-twentieth century America, which is characterized by images of isolated individuals and demonstrates the rise of alienation.

Edward Hopper's Beginnings

Much like Edward Hopper's paintings, what the public knows of his life is spare but meaningful. Hopper was born on July 22, 1882 in Nyack, New York. His family's forebears included English, Dutch, and Welsh. His father, Garrett Hopper, oversaw a dry goods business in Nyack. Not unlike most children, Edward had become an avid drawer by the age of five, and he even started signing his work by the age of ten. He copied the work of such illustrators as Phil May and Gustave Doré, but unsurprisingly, Hopper felt compelled to express himself through his surroundings. As framed by Nyack harbor, the pulsating waves and restless ships of the Hudson River took up residence in the young artist's imagination.

Hopper's parents did not object to his desire to study art, but they did suggest he practice illustration or commercial art instead of painting. At the age of seventeen, he enrolled in the Correspondence School of Illustrating in New York City, before transferring to the New York School of Art (also known as the Chase School). Per his parents' wishes for him to build a financially stable career, Hopper first focused on

illustration. However, he soon switched to painting and studied under William Merritt Chase, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and Robert Henri. Even though some of Hopper's classmates—including George Bellows and Rockwell Kent—gained fame more quickly than he did, the magazine *The Sketch Book* featured one of his drawings in a 1904 article on the New York School of Art.

In 1906, Hopper finished his studies and went to Paris for about a year. He did not attend school, but found himself painting from a vantage point that he that he would later explore further: outdoors. The art exhibitions in Paris did not impress him, despite inclusions of paintings by contemporary American artists Max Weber and Henry Bruce. Bruce, a former classmate of Hopper's from New York, guided Hopper's eye to the work of Impressionists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Hopper paid little mind, later claiming he had never heard of Picasso (Kranzfelder 9). After visiting London, marveling at Rembrandt's



Figure 1. van Rijn, Rembrandt. *De Nachtwacht*. 1642, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam. Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_Watch#/media/File:The_Nightwatch_by_Rembrandt_-_Rijksmuseum.jpg.

De Nachtwacht (*The Night Watch*) (1642) (Figure 1) in Amsterdam, and stopping in Berlin, Hopper returned to New York in 1907. Two more European treks over the next three years offered little more artistic interest to Hopper.

In 1913, Hopper's painting *Sailing* sold for \$250 at the revolutionary International Exhibition of Modern Art. At the age of 31, Hopper called this his first sale as well as his last for the next ten years. As he embarked upon various professional endeavors, such as co-founding the club that became the Whitney Museum of American

Art, Hopper settled into the subject that came to define his career: America and its landscapes. In 1923, Hopper's girlfriend and future wife, watercolor painter Josephine Nivison, drew Brooklyn Museum curators' eyes to Hopper's work. This attention led to a commercial one-man show that finally allowed Hopper to shed his work as an illustrator. As he continued to hone his style, Hopper slowly stripped away the European influences acquired on his earlier sojourns, focusing instead on low angles and solitary figures. "Just to paint a representation or design is not hard," Hopper later said, "but to express a thought in painting is" (Levin, *Edward* 49). His wife, Jo, modelled for Hopper's paintings, and he chose his subjects for their "synthesis of [his] inner experience" (Levin, *Edward* 52). His unique mixture of darkness, candidness, eroticism, and loneliness have carried through his work and into the lives of his work's viewers, long past his death on May 15, 1967.

Critical Reception as a Painter

Until the mid-1920s, Hopper struggled to attract substantial critical attention to his paintings. Critics took issue with Hopper's French theme paintings, but even the American theme paintings—which eventually came to dominate Hopper's work—failed to elicit substantial critical recognition. The little success Hopper did have early on centered on his printmaking ability, as his prints were often accepted into exhibitions and sold well at modest prices. Despite high marks for his printmaking prowess from the National Academy of Design (who routinely rejected Hopper's paintings), Hopper always viewed himself as painter (Levin, *Edward* 38). Nonetheless, several soon-to-be-familiar subjects decorated his etchings: trains, boats, people in interiors, and urban streets. Hopper's breakthrough came in 1923 when the Brooklyn Museum exhibited six

of his watercolor paintings next to the watercolors of his future wife, Jo. The museum also acquired *The Mansard Roof* (1923) (Figure 2), making it the first of Hopper's



Figure 2. Hopper, Edward. *The Mansard Roof*. 1923. Brooklyn Museum, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/22909>.

paintings purchased by an institution. This depiction of a Gloucester Victorian home foreshadows Hopper's fixation on lonely buildings. However, *The Mansard Roof* lacks two attributes that would come to define Hopper: it does not feature his signature crisp, realistic style, and it does not penetrate through the dark, shuttered

windows to study its solitary inhabitants. Nevertheless, Hopper drew ecstatic reviews from critics.

For a large portion of the twentieth century, critics considered Hopper a realist, but they also disdained realism for its populist mentality. His wife, Jo, once remarked of Hopper's painting *Cape Cod Morning* (1950), "It's a woman looking out to see if the weather's good enough to hang out her wash." Hopper's response: "Did I say that? You're making it Norman Rockwell. From my point of view, she's just looking out the window, looking out the window" (Proulx). As the nation encircled social consciousness and nationalism in the 1930s through the 1940s, critics came to agree with Hopper that his work deviated from the technically proficient patriotism of the likes of Rockwell; they recognized Hopper as a pensive titan of American art. In 1956, *Time* magazine featured Hopper on its cover and said that since World War II, Americans had "awakened" to the heritage of art depicting American life, "rough and smooth, tumultuous and diverse" (Proulx). *Time* declared that Hopper was the "revered

champion" of American art's strongest element: "searching realism" (Proulx). "Hopper had no small talk," art historian Lloyd Goodrich wrote. "...he had perceptive things to say, expressed tersely with weight and exactness, and uttered in a slow reluctant monotone" (Berman). Coupled with his "searching realism," this sparse specificity defines Hopper's influential style.

Cultural Background

As Hopper came of age in the early twentieth century, several formalist experiments emerged in the art world. From the 1910s through the 1920s, Cubism revolutionized art, especially painting, by eschewing the idea of a single viewpoint. Using such elements as simple geometric shapes, interlocking planes, and collage, cubists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque sought to depict multiple perspectives at once, an idea called multiplicity. Cubism's linking of urbanization and modern life inspired Futurism in the 1910s. Originating in Italy, Futurism focused on such modern subjects as technology, cities, violence, speed, cars, and airplanes. Meanwhile, Germany birthed the art school the Staatliches Bauhaus (also known as the Bauhaus), which operated from 1919 to 1933. Members opposed the expressionism popular at the time to create economically conscious, simple, modernist works. Consciously or not, Edward Hopper's work would echo these movements. In particular, he emulated the economy of composition led by the Bauhaus. Hopper also shared with Cubism and Futurism a fascination with the city's effect on the individual modern life.

This time period underwent industrial upheaval. The Ford Model T made its formal introduction in 1908, but even that modern invention did not become completely

woven into the fabric of America for a few more years. By the 1920s, the nation teemed with a new energy—an energy generated not only by the increasingly prevalent automobiles, but by brick, metal, and glass. Pedestrians now ricocheted like pinballs between the ever-sprouting buildings in cities like Chicago and New York. Even today, approximately 100 years later, Americans generally view cities as massive, whirring organisms that never find the time to stop and think. And yet, Edward Hopper gleaned from this metallic new world not so much the bustle on the surface, but the stillness within. With his bristles, Hopper stroked canvas and penetrated the gleaming steel of the city. When Hopper saw a metropolis, he did not see streets jam-packed with ant armies of walkers with swinging suitcases or purses. He did not see countless cars hugging the ground, parting the masses like Moses. Instead, he saw people sitting. Thinking. Looking.

The Advent of Film

One of America's new favorite activities during this period happened to consist of sitting, thinking, and looking: watching movies. What seemed like a fleeting novelty in the late 19th century had projected into multi-reel mass entertainment by the 1920s. Most Americans visited a theater at least once a week, taking their seats in neat grids to see displayed before them stories that they had never seen before. Movies provided a glowing reprieve from the monotony of everyday existence. Each motion picture was the same to every person who saw it, unifying the nation by injecting created characters and events into their collective imagination. This lasted through the silent era (1895-1926, punctuated by *The Jazz Singer* in 1927)

While cinemas and cinema screens do appear in some of Hopper's paintings—most notably in *New York Movie* (1939)—a movie screen stand-in frequently appears in their stead: the window. Hopper's characters look through windows at cityscapes, but they do not act upon these surroundings. In this sense, they are spectators just like filmgoers. Anyone who gazes at something takes ownership of what they see in order to project their thoughts onto it; therefore, they are spectators of their own minds. This idea links back to the cinema, where audiences sought escape from the repetitive, or even sad or disappointing rhythms of their own lives. In Hopper



Figure 3. Hopper, Edward. *Morning Sun*. 1952, [Edwardhopper.net](https://www.edwardhopper.net/morning-sun.jsp#prettyPhoto), <https://www.edwardhopper.net/morning-sun.jsp#prettyPhoto>.

paintings like *Morning Sun* (1952) (Figure 3), characters appear to be sad or pensive, yearning for relief from their own lives and minds. The window offers a different world, untouched; it offers escape just like the film screen.

In her book *Edward Hopper*, art historian Gail Levin says, "As in romantic nineteenth-century art, the window symbolized the expansive world beyond but also served as a barrier separating the viewer-voyeur from the drama within" (39). Although Levin does not explicitly name the cinema, she essentially describes the connection between Hopper's windows and the cinema screen. According to Levin, Hopper's paintings even came together like a film production: Hopper played director to his wife, Jo, a former actress, giving his muse a variety of roles to portray as she posed (Levin, *Edward* 52). Jo even played assistant to property master, as she shopped for the precise props he wanted to inhabit his pictures (Levin, *Edward* 52). The most glaring difference

between a painting and a film is that a film moves on its own—once a director, a cast, a crew have struck their work to celluloid, it cannot be changed, but it moves of its own volition upon its own track of narrative. Paintings do not move. But their content has just as much ability to move the viewer, emotionally and intellectually.

PAINTINGS

Nighthawks (1942)

Edward Hopper's signature piece—and one of the most recognizable paintings of all time—is perhaps the definitive portrait of American loneliness in the twentieth century. Countless critics have been awed by its acute alienation. Regarding the despondent man and woman, there has been much discourse about their lack of discourse: "The couple at the counter have little to say to each other" (Schmeid 56).

Another author mused: "There is no direct communication between the couple in their



Figure 4. Hopper, Edward. *Nighthawks*. 1942, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nighthawks>.

glass cage" (Kranzfelder 150).

This work of art has so ingrained itself into the American zeitgeist that there have been exhaustive searches for the real diner.

Hopper expert Gail Levin pinpointed the lot in New

York City where Greenwich Avenue intersects with 11th and Seventh Avenue, known as Mulry Square (Moss). After "creating a shattered-glass array of triangular corners," however, *New York Times* writer Jeremiah Moss concluded that the diner may have been fabricated by Hopper (Moss). The probability that the diner never existed may be disappointing to some, but it speaks to the timeless, mythical nature of the painting.

Nighthawks (1942) (Figure 4) does not belong to a real place on Earth; instead, it takes

up residence in the minds of its viewers. The diner's great window invites empathy and wonderment.

In *Nighthawks*, Hopper finds several humans. Three sit, one stands. They all look. The very act of looking is a universal one. Most humans have the privilege of using their eyes for the better part of each day, constantly capturing the visual expanses before them with little to no effort. But Hopper was not as interested in the look as he was the gaze. To gaze is to inhale through the pupils. Many of Hopper's paintings illustrate as much. *Nighthawks* has acted as the face of not only many a poster, but many a book cover, many a postcard, many an art institute umbrella—the image has become one of the most consistently reproduced images of the twentieth century. Scanning the painting's mise-en-scene, we can deduce that the woman in the red dress stares downward, but it is unclear where her male companion's gaze lies.

This man, like so many of Hopper's still figures, breathes through his eyes. Air enters in past his cornea, travels through the stem, and feeds straight into the reservoir of thought in his brain. His diaphragm hums steadily as he projects and injects his musings into the scene before him. Hopper in *Nighthawks* challenges his viewers to consider this scene as an unspoken drama that captures a group of diners and the inscrutability of their gazes. For example, viewers could assume that the male customer at the counter gazes out of the frame at a dark city street like the one we can see to his right. But it is unclear what exactly this man is thinking. The object or destination of his gaze is fundamentally unknowable.

Even if we cannot fully decipher the gaze, we can look to the character's faces to try to understand their loneliness. Still, Hopper offers no easy answers. The man who gazes looks resigned at first, but the slight crook to his lips suggests a deeper emotion.

Perhaps this man feels bitter about his relationship to the woman next to him. Perhaps he feels wistful, dreaming of a life in the future or far gone. Or maybe he grimaces due to the surprising lack of sugar in his coffee. The shadow cast by the brim of his fedora suggests that his gaze belongs to the darkness, the uncertainty outside the diner. To his right in the painting, the woman appears to be bored or frustrated with her plight. Maybe she has given up trying to get her male companion's attention, deciding that the object in her hand (a folded napkin?) might be more receptive to her gaze. Her red dress and lips suggest lust, but her downturned eyes and empty fingers betray her alienation to us.

The bartender goes about his business, his mouth hung slightly open as he reaches beneath the bar. His raised brow suggests a receptiveness to small talk or to an order made by one of the customers. His white outfit may signify innocence, as if he is the victim to one of the customer's menacing remarks. If one of the fedora-donning men have made a threat of violence, perhaps the bartender reaches for a six-shooter or a 12-gauge. The last man turns his back to the viewer, hiding his face. Maybe he wallows in his own rye and sorrow, maybe not. His anonymity epitomizes the mystery of the painting—we will never know the emotions or intentions of any of these characters. But their isolation permeates the piece. Hopper himself has verbalized confirmed as much: "Unconsciously, probably I was painting the loneliness of a large city" (Hobbs 129).

Most of the attention on *Nighthawks* focuses on the interior of the diner. However, the exterior of the restaurant has just as much to say about the alienation of the mid-twentieth century. It is so tempting to fixate on the inhabitants' loneliness that it can be easy to forget what makes them lonely: there are no signs of human life outside of their glass haven. There are no people walking in or out of the establishment, nobody

taking a night stroll. There aren't even any automobiles, some of the most dominant machines of the era. All that we can see are empty windows and an unattended register. The only hint of sentient life are the blinds on the second story windows across the street, which have been lowered to varying degrees. The street itself appears to have been possessed by an alien green aura, filtered by the lights within the diner. Even so, this shade of green has no business occupying the streets of Greenwich Village, where many speculate Hopper found his inspiration. Hopper makes the color unnatural, out of this world, so as to make the diner-goers' solitary existence even more alarming. The window in *Nighthawks* is one of the largest in his oeuvre, stretching from one end of the establishment, hugging the street corner, and traveling out the frame into infinity. As such, this painting also has the largest film screen proxy. Since we look from the outside in through the window, the characters' actions are the film for us. Since the characters can see through the window at the viewer too though, Hopper makes the us feel filmed as well, equating the characters' loneliness with the isolation of the lone observer outside the painting.

Automat (1927)

In the 1920s, hungry Americans visited restaurants called automats. Customers entered the front double doors to find no servers, no manager, no visible staff of any kind, save for a young, rubber finger-tipped woman who morphed dollar bills into change. Her designation: "nickel-thrower" (Crowley). Armed with their new five-cent pieces, customers then faced the culinary version of Ray Bradbury's television walls in *Fahrenheit 451*: massive grids of small wall-mounted cubbies clearly labeled: meatloaf,

mashed potatoes, pie, coffee, and more. The most famous chain, Horn and Hardart, made its debut in 1912 and served 800,000 customers a day at its peak (Crowley). Despite the popularity of these establishments, Hopper recognized them as an epitome of the American alienation that took root in the early twentieth century. This particular brand of alienation resulted from rampant attempts to move the world into the future via machinery. This is called Taylorism, a theory that seeks to increase the efficiency of production by fragmenting jobs into separate low-skill tasks ("Taylorism").

With his painting *Automat* (1927) (Figure 5), Hopper highlights the absurdity of the notion that even food, the fuel that allows humans to live, has been mass produced and monopolized by this new age. Food has made the complete transformation from live animals being caught, slaughtered, and cooked to materializing out of thin air behind a small glass door. At this point, food is just another consumable item on the glossy globe. Perhaps even more importantly, the reign of the automat made eating alone all the easier—since customers no longer even had to order from a real server, the

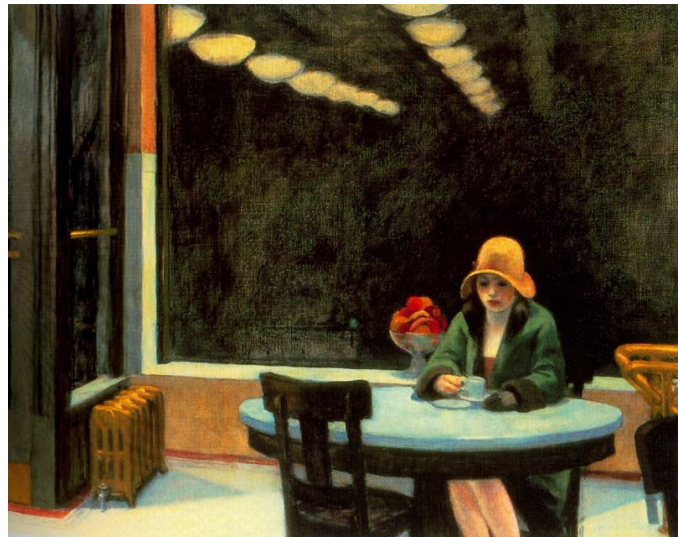


Figure 5. Hopper, Edward. *Automat*. 1927, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines. Edwardhopper.net, <https://www.edwardhopper.net/automat.jsp>.

human connection was minimized. In this painting, Hopper pictures this unique loneliness in the woman sitting alone, with only her own reflection in her coffee to suggest that all human life has not been extinguished.

In *Automat*, the character neglects the window entirely. However, the audience can see the massive pane of glass adorning the eatery. If the window stands in for the

cinema screen, the feature is not so much a two-reeler as it is an avant-garde experiment. Most of the glass appears muddled and impressionistic, with grey, brown, and blue mixing in a dirty pool of obscurity. Even though the character herself does not look out the window, this unkempt mass of color represents how the outside world feels to her—coarse, warped, and uninviting. The only discernible shapes in the window are twin rows of lights, reflected from inside the restaurant. Like the automat itself, the lights symbolize the electrified new stage in American history; their organization evokes the assembly lines that now produced identical cars, products, and in the case of the automat, food. Meticulously ordered as they are, the lights transform the window into a tunnel, an abyss of loneliness for the woman to wander through without purpose or companionship. Instead, she stays within the walls of the automat, where steaming food greets her.

All the trappings of the painting funnel into the lone woman's face. Her downturned, pale complexion mirrors the emptiness of the rest of the scene. Her gaze bores into her old coffee, extracting the cold destitution, injecting it into herself. Her flushed cheeks might be the result of the establishment's heating unit (pictured to her left in the frame), another hallmark of industrialization. The redness also suggests embarrassment, or perhaps a recent crying spell. Paired with her seemingly luxurious green coat, her rouged cheeks project the Roaring Twenties, but they reveal her envy for social interaction. Complementing her green outer layer, the brightest visual point in the painting rests behind her in the bright red and orange fruit bowl on the windowsill. The shocking, disparate color resembles gore, as if the automat has ripped the woman's organs from her bodily cavity and displayed them for passerby to observe in the window. Here Hopper enters into allegory, or the use of a single entity to represent hidden

meanings other than those on the surface ("Allegory"). In this case, Hopper acts as a social critic, insinuating that the mundane reality of inventions like automats strip their inhabitants of humanity and leave them to wallow in their own loneliness.

Night Windows (1928)

A familiar yellowish glow interjects Hopper's *Night Windows* (1928) (Figure 6). Even though Hopper created this painting some 14 years before *Nighthawks*, the yellow unites the two works by placing them in the same artificial world. Not only has the

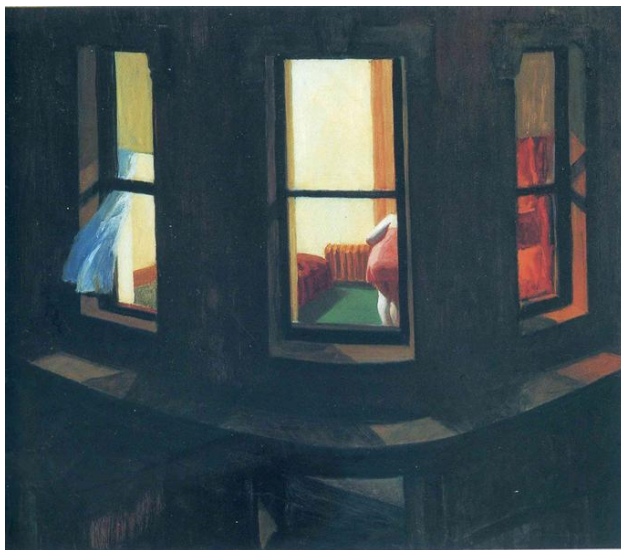


Figure 6. Hopper, Edward. *Night Windows*. 1928, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, [Wikiart](https://www.wikiart.org/en/edward-hopper/night-windows), <https://www.wikiart.org/en/edward-hopper/night-windows>.

industrialization of mid-twentieth century America invaded the restaurants, it has also found residence in citizen's homes. Between the open windows and the heating unit inside the apartment, Hopper draws attention to the fact that homes were continually evolving to make private life easier and more comfortable. In the 1920s, engineers advanced this trend by eliminating the previously toxic coolant from air conditioning units and making them smaller (Rosen). More and more, these doodads unwittingly discouraged homeowners from leaving the house, leading to more of the isolation found in *Night Windows*.

In the continuous saga of Hopper using the window as a stand-in for the film screen, *Night Windows* offers three panes for our viewing pleasure, not the character's.

Herein lies why Hopper sets the perspective *Night Windows* outside an apartment building. With this point of view, he invokes the kinetoscope, the forerunner to the motion picture film project invented by Thomas Edison and William Dickson in 1891 (Thompson and Bordwell 7). Through a peephole and a spinning wheel, viewers glimpsed snippets of motion at 46 frames per second (Thompson and Bordwell 8). By making this invocation, Hopper implicates the viewer in one specific lonely activity: voyeurism. As if the viewer has just inserted a nickel into the side of the painting, the center window offers a version of a nickelodeon peep show from the early twentieth century, unbeknownst to the woman herself. Hopper calls out these primal sexual desires, placing the woman's bare legs and clothed bottom directly in the center of the window and the painting. Furthermore, we have no reasonable idea what the woman herself is thinking. Unlike many of Hopper's paintings, we cannot see the character's face at all. This strips her of her humanity and renders her a subject instead of a person. This objectification of the woman further fortifies Hopper's idea of loneliness at home—coaxed into staying inside her apartment building, she subjects herself to the leering eyes of passing men against her will. The searing red in the right-side window depicts the uninhibited flames of peeping toms' lust.

Among this painting's array of windows, however, the most obscured panes reveal just as much as the wide-open ones. In the apartment below the woman's, the lights are extinguished, rendering the interior nigh impossible to discern. The dark, blue-brown muddle recalls the massive window in *Automat*. Like in that painting from one year earlier, the unsavory scene is unseen by the character. This time, though, she doesn't just have her back turned; she resides on a completely different floor. She stays above the disturbing chaos, with little regard for the story below. The darkened

apartment makes up only a small portion of the painting—Hopper's way of implying humans' way of ignoring troubling happenings on the periphery of society. They would rather gaze into the open window of the anonymous, attractive woman upstairs, blissfully unaware that her apartment contains as much loneliness as does the vacant lot beneath her.

Compartment C Car (1938)

By the late 1930s, railroads had crisscrossed the nation for two centuries, especially following the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. This wood-and-iron chokehold provided transportation for goods across the country with unprecedented speed. For the passengers, though, the train represented a more passive mode of travel than ever before: within the huge metal snake, humans simply sat and waited in their individual seats to be delivered to their destination. The wealthy furthered the isolation, paying premium prices to have their very own compartments. The Chicago-based Pullman Company offered just such luxury and privacy with their hotel-like sleeping cars. In fact, creator George Pullman is said to have joked that he ran the largest hotel in America (Khederian). Hopper did not only see luxury and



Figure 7. Hopper, Edward. *Compartment C Car*. 1938, private collection. Edwardhopper.net, <https://www.edwardhopper.net/compartment-c-car.jsp>.

comfort in these train cars, as evidenced by his painting *Compartment C Car* (1938) (Figure 7). Instead, he saw yet another vehicle for alienation.

Although trains were no longer a new invention by the time Hopper painted *Compartment Car C*, this evolved brand of transportation provided a mobile example of loneliness for him. Upon first glance, this painting may seem innocuous—a woman sits in a luxury train car, reading a newspaper or periodical. Outside the window: a lovely countryside scene, replete with trees and the marbled yellow-orange of dusk. A closer reading of the work reveals a more troubling significance. One of the most fascinating details in the frame is the woman's expression. Her visage faces downward—similar to the solitary female in *Automat*. This might simply convey an absorption in her reading material, but the similarity to the starkly lonely *Automat* suggests unrest. Since her eyes hide behind a wide-brimmed hat, we have only her mouth to determine her mood. Alas, her lips do not offer many more clues: their reddish, shadowed triangle could be a resting smile of content—the involuntary result of her silent reading—but they might also be pursed with unease, impatience.

The invention of the passenger train also made the window into more of a film screen than ever before by enabling it to feature an endless stream of moving pictures. In the painting, the window gives way to the outside. Hopper uses the sunset to enhance the sense that there is nothing malicious to notice at first viewing; sunsets are often considered to be one of the most beautiful times of day, presiding over that mode of lighting coveted by filmmakers and photographers, Magic Hour. However, this sunset has more to offer than just pleasant illumination. Set against the exclusively cool tones of the train car's inside, the yellow and orange are like eager tongues of flame licking the scene. Cast behind the trees in the middle ground of the exterior view, the flaming sky

looks like a forest fire. This represents nature fighting against the new age, to no avail. The train speeds away from this firestorm so that only a sliver of it is left to see from the windows. Meanwhile, the woman sits in the car, protected by specially molded metal. The woman need not pay the setting sun any mind—the artificial lamps in her private car can manufacture the feeling of daytime at any time. She can continue reading whatever she wants with no regard for the natural surroundings outside.

The colors inside the car are cool, detached, and metallic. Green pervades the interior, an indicator of both opulence and desire. Like he does with paintings such as *Nighthawks* and *Automat*, Hopper frames *Compartment Car C* with ample negative space around his human subject. Some might dismiss such a tactic, questioning why the upper third of the painting needs to be devoted to the blank wall of the train car. Hopper includes this extra space precisely because of its emptiness. He details the shining surfaces that make up the panels, once again highlighting the inhuman sheen of the industrialized assembly line production of the early to mid-twentieth century. Hopper would return to the furnished interior of train car compartments nearly three decades later in *Chair Car* (1965). Even though that piece features not one occupant but four, the familiar green of *Compartment Car C* still pervades. They still read in silence. They still want to be left alone.

New York Movie (1939)

Audiences and critics hallowed the movies in 1939. *The Los Angeles Times* has called it the greatest year in Hollywood history, “a feast of light and shadow” during which almost every week brought flickering delights to the silver screen (Matthews). Such anointed classics as Frank Capra’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Howard Hawks’ *Only Angels Have Wings*, John Ford’s *Stagecoach*, and Victor Fleming’s *Gone With the Wind* represent only a portion of this cinematic behemoth. The premieres and the theaters themselves attracted monumental attention, like the unveiling of the adored *The Wizard of Oz* at Graumann’s Chinese Theater in Hollywood. Amidst this all-time high in excitement and glitz for film, Edward Hopper decided to create a snapshot from the inside of a movie house. He painted a lonely usher in a near-empty theater. Hopper’s *New York Movie* (1939) (Figure 8) comments that even the twentieth century’s new form of mass entertainment enables America’s loneliness.

The mise-en-scene of *New York Movie* resembles other major works of Hopper, notably *Automat*. Like in that 1927 painting, *New York Movie* features a young woman, her face turned down in contemplation. Instead of studying a cup of coffee, she rests four pale fingers beneath her chin. Also like in *Automat*, Hopper places the woman off-center to suggest her precarious position in the environment she inhabits. Judging by her blue-and-red uniform, she is the designated usher for this theater, but a wall separates her and the film. She closes her eyes, rejecting any silver sliver of the film’s light.

Despite emotional and compositional similarities with paintings like *Nighthawks*, *Automat*, and *Compartment C Car*, *New York Movie* lacks one of the most ubiquitous elements of Hopper's work: the window. Considering this work is set in a movie theater, this is unsurprising; the light invited indoors by windows would break the spell of the film screen. Opposed to Hopper's frequent use of the window as a surrogate movie screen, *New York Movie* gives us an actual screen. But what do we see on this all-important projection? Almost nothing: Hopper crops off about three-quarters of the black-and-white frame, leaving us with abstract lines and shapes to parse for



Figure 8. Hopper, Edward. *New York Movie*. 1939. *The Museum of Modern Art*, New York, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79616>.

ourselves. The subject matter onscreen is anyone's guess—perhaps a cityscape, or lovers clasped in one another's arms. Whatever it is being projected, it can draw neither the usher's attention nor a sizable crowd. Here, Hopper once again moves into the realm of allegory. He defies the fact that crowds of

people were in fact flocking to the pictures at the time, instead painting a desolate theater to suggest that the film has little to say to its audience. In the beginning, the movies were designed to be an escape, but *New York Movie* insinuates that motion pictures cannot be considered an ultimate reprieve from reality. Even though Hopper is known to have been a fan of movies himself, he identifies in this painting the inherent contradiction of filmgoing: that which purports to transport the viewer away also

requires the viewer to be still and trapped. When left to their devices, like the usher, they are enabled to return to their thoughts and loneliness.

FILM NOIR

Background

Visual and thematic inspiration from Edward Hopper's paintings have graced the frames of many films, but nowhere is his influence more evident in the cinema than in the genre of film noir. In French, film noir means "black film" or "dark film." Film noir emerged in the early 1940s, in the middle of World War II. The genre expresses the violence and the unease of this global undertaking, as well as the psychological damage that GIs took home with them when the war ended. Films noir often follow private eyes, criminals, policemen, and others. Whatever the profession, the main character is usually a jaded figure who becomes embroiled in a dark plot involving crime. Films noir often conclude with a cynical view of the unfair, unordered nature of the world. Although have never agreed on a single definition of film noir, Paul Schrader's "Notes on Film Noir" is considered one of the best distillations of the genre. In this article, the screenwriter-director identifies several key attributes of film noir, especially noting its fatalism: "Never before had films fared to take such a harsh uncomplimentary look at American life..." (8). *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), directed by John Huston and starring Humphrey Bogart, is widely considered the first true film noir.

It does not require a second glance at Hopper paintings like *Nighthawks* and *Automat* to sense the dark connective tissue to this genre. In the collection *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, film scholar Lucy Fischer identifies noir tropes in various Hopper works, such as the possible femme fatales in *Compartment C Car* and in *Hotel Lobby* (1943) (Fischer 342). Fischer even overlays

common film noir plot points directly on top of the paintings, suggesting that corpses might be discarded or discovered among the train tracks of *Approaching a City* (1946), or that the man and woman of *Conference at Night* (1949) might be hatching a tryst (or something more sinister) (Fischer 342). Hopper's work blends so well with films noir in this way that they might be considered cross-compatible, with characters walking freely between the frames of the two media. Besides these visual touchpoints, Hopper shares a formative influence with film noir in German Expressionism, an early twentieth century movement that emphasized high contrast, light, and shadow. Just as a film like Billy Wilder's film noir *Double Indemnity* (1944) echoes the exaggerated silhouettes of Fritz Lang's expressionist murder drama *M* (1931) (Figure 10), so too do early Hopper etchings like *Night Shadows* (1925) (Figure 9) recall the German films' elongated shadows.

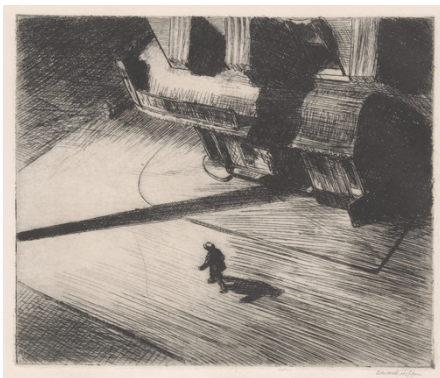


Figure 9. Hopper, Edward. *Night Shadows*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/25.31.2/>.



Figure 10. *M*. Directed by Fritz Lang, Vereinigte Star-Film GmbH, 11 May 1931.

In addition, both Hopper's paintings and film noir exhibit the essence of melodrama. Strictly speaking, a melodrama is a piece in which characters and events are heightened in order to maximize drama and appeal to the emotions of the audience. Oftentimes, only one or a few characters populate melodramas. These attributes appear

in most of Hopper's paintings. The lone characters of *Automat*, *Compartment C Car*, and *New York Movie*, among countless others, exist in private worlds of light and silence. Their surroundings center on and exaggerate the inner turmoil hinted at by their faces. And of course there's the Hopper grail, *Nighthawks*, with its silent, mysterious ballet of will and emotion among its four characters. Film noir takes melodrama to the next step by adorning it with more overt depictions of death and sex. In *Encyclopedia of Film Noir*, authors Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell posit that film noir was one of melodrama's many "inflections" in the 1940s, one with a particular propensity for violence and sexuality (Mayer and McDonnell 15).

Yet another connection between Hopper's paintings and film noir lies in a third medium: photography. One photographer whose work makes a great companion for Hopper's work is Arthur Fellig. Better known as "Weegee," Fellig captured gritty stills of real-life crimes, injuries, and deaths in New York during the 1930s and 1940s (Figure 11). In her book *Art History for Filmmakers: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, author Gillian McIver places Weegee's photos alongside Hopper's paintings as touchpoints for filmmakers (McIver



Figure 9. Fellig, Arthur. "Untitled." *New York Daily News*, International Center of Photography/Getty, 1941, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/shocking-photos-famed-crime-photographer-weegee-gallery-1.1282477>.

76). Specifically, she cites Weegee's dramatized portraits of the city's underbelly, followed by Hopper's more authentic portrayal of urban environments in all their "wondrous stillness and silence" (McIver 76). McIver still identifies the "bustle" of

Weegee's photographs in the paintings, but the difference is that Hopper lets the "racket" take place outside of the frame to focus on "momentarily tranquil spaces" (Iclver 76). In this sense, Weegee links Hopper with film noir by placing front and center the murder and death that may lurk in Hopper's paintings. Film noir combines Hopper's loneliness with Weegee's overt violence.

The most significant kinship between Hopper's work and film noir lies in the single, lonesome character. Despite noir's stylistic flair, this character shares with Hopper a palpable somber nature. Just like the Philip Marlowe character that was translated from Raymond Chandler's novels into several films noir (including *The Maltese Falcon*; *The Big Sleep* [1946], *Murder, My Sweet* [1944]; and more) and portrayed by many actors (most notably Humphrey Bogart, Dick Powell, and Robert Mitchum), Hopper's lonely figure appears in a plethora of places and forms. Although their specific goals may differ moment-to-moment, the main characters of Hopper and film noir share a disillusionment with their surroundings. They are lonely.

The Killers (1946)

More than any other film, the one most closely associated with Edward Hopper is *The Killers* (1946), directed by Robert Siodmak. One reason for this association is that Hopper was a fan of the source material, Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Killers" (1927). In her biography *Edward Hopper*, Hopper expert Gail Levin suspects that the artist's fascination with Hemingway's short story stemmed from the "suspense of impending violence that never takes place" (66). In this vein, Levin postulates that the title of *Nighthawks* embodies the potentially predatory predispositions of the bar-

dwellers. Indeed, in many of Hopper's paintings, violence or conflict seems to brew but never bubbles to the surface.

In a visual sense, Hopper is also said to have been inspired by the diner in Hemingway's story. In the film adaptation of *The Killers*, Siodmak returns the homage once more to Hopper: in the opening scene, two fedora-wearing strangers arrive at a diner quite similar to *Phillies* in *Nighthawks* (Figure 12). When we first see the Henry's diner in the film, the exterior of the eatery is even framed like the one in Hopper's painting. The corner of the establishment lands in the left-hand side of the frame, and



Figure 10. *The Killers*. Directed by Robert Siodmak, Universal Pictures, 28 Aug 1946.

the rest of it travels to the right and off the screen. Whereas Hopper placed his vantage point outside however, Siodmak obscures his windows; the director depicts the action from the inside.

Although this scene might be read as the most direct translation of Hopper to a film noir screen, *The Killers* offers far more details regarding the inhabitants'

agendas. Soon after they arrive, the strangers inform the bartender that their job is to kill Pete "Swede" Lund, portrayed by Burt Lancaster. Diner-goer Nick Adams makes a mad dash for Swede's boardinghouse. Nick warns Swede. Swede's answer: "I did something wrong... once." Following this succinct distillation of the fatalism of film noir is an image just as essential to the identity of the genre. The frame also may as well have been ripped straight from a Hopper painting.

Swede waits alone in his dark room as the killers ascend the stairs in his building (Figure 13). At this point, a customary drama would dictate that a chase scene should occur. Not in *The Killers*, and not under Hopper's hand either. In the spirit of film noir, the main character confronts his fate whether he deserves it or not. He lies on his bed, totally swathed in shadow. As Swede raises himself to sit, light strikes through the window onto his face, several more bars of shadow thwacking him on the way. As he gazes deep into the dark depths of his imminent death, the light acts like a spotlight. It's almost like the world's recognition that it is Swede's time to die. And yet, he is alone. Siodmak heightens the loneliness of the moment before death to almost a supernatural level. The reasons why Swede must be killed do eventually



Figure 11. *The Killers*. Directed by Robert Siodmak, Universal Pictures, 28 Aug 1946.

get revealed via flashback—they involve heists, jewelry, and infidelity—but they might as well have been left a secret, so strong is this lonely image of a man face-to-face with fate. *The Killers* could have been an excellent twelve-minute film if it had ended when the Swede is brutally mown down by the killers' bullets. The aftermath is not shown. We only see the barrels ablaze, then a police autopsy technician's grisly remark, "Got eight slugs in 'im. Near tore 'im in half."

There are other visual touchpoints between *The Killers* and Hopper's work, namely Swede's place of employment, a gas station that recalls Hopper's rural-set *Gas* (1940). However, no other still offers more insight into Hopper than that solitary image

of Swede on the bed, alone. The scene leading up to Swede's death in the film illustrates the tenuousness of existence that Hopper's characters experience. We can never know how near or far Hopper's characters are from death—for all we know, the characters in *Nighthawks* may be seconds away from drawing arms and gunning one another to death. For that matter, the *Nighthawks* just as well might totally bored and nowhere near their respective demises. We cannot know, what their fates will be, but *The Killers* presents perhaps the worst case scenario: death, alone.

Mildred Pierce (1945)

On the surface, the story of *Mildred Pierce* (1945) may not seem like a normal film noir. In the sense that it does not prominently feature detectives, killers, and copious death, it does not sit in the genre as comfortably as do its counterparts. In foregoing these tropes though, this Michael Curtiz-directed film actually has more kinship with the work of Hopper, wherein any death or violence can only be implied. The milieu of much of the film also recalls the work of Hopper—diners. After her husband Bert loses his job and escapes their marriage to his mistress, Mildred, portrayed by Joan Crawford, makes ends meet by becoming a waitress and baking pies. Mildred's daughter, Veda, ridicules her mother for taking up such a lowly profession, so Mildred opens a restaurant.

In pursuit of the love and acceptance of the snobbish Veda, Mildred cultivates her business into a chain of successful restaurants. Mildred appears to have conquered the machine that the woman of Hopper's *Automat* (1927) finds herself imprisoned within. In that her chain of eateries feature living, breathing service, Mildred defeats the very idea of the automat in a sense. Mildred's inherent humanity would prohibit such a lifeless, automated business. More significantly though, Mildred's successful business



Figure 12. *Mildred Pierce*. Directed by Michael Curtiz, Warner Bros., 28 Sep 1945.

posits the idea that a lone woman—even a woman surrounded by sadness like the one in *Automat*—can not only rise above loneliness and depression, but come to literally own this establishment which engenders loneliness. The fact that Mildred is a woman also links the

film to Hopper, who often placed women at the center of his pieces. From *Automat* to *Compartment Car C* to *New York Movie* to *New York Office* (1962), Hopper considered women as equally worthy subjects—and victims—to men in his studies of loneliness in the city. All of these characters Hopper modelled after his wife, Jo. Mildred overcomes the challenge of being an independent woman in a mid-twentieth century urban environment, in a way triumphing over both Hopper's and film noir's spirit of desolation and isolation. Unfortunately, Mildred's perceived triumph is short-lived.

The story *Mildred Pierce* ends in the spirit of film noir; that is, Mildred loses both a chunk of her business and Veda. It is here—near the beginning of the film’s runtime but late in its nonlinear chronology—that the imagery of the film and Hopper overlap most significantly. This confluence reaches an apex as Mildred trudges down a dock near her home. She clutches a railing and stares out into the abyss of nighttime sea (classic home video company The Criterion Collection chose this image for their Blu-Ray release in 2017 [Figure 15]). Behind Mildred, the neon of a cafe shimmers as if to remind her of the modern world that has contributed to her downfall. Although her restaurants have developed into a popular chain, they never gained her the respect of Veda. Even though *Mildred Pierce* was conceived and released in the middle of the 1940s, these images instantly recall the lonesome woman of *Automat*. It is unlikely these women arrived at this state in the same fashion: Mildred Regardless of how each of these women arrived at this solitary crossroads, they may as well be the same person at this moment. They drown in loneliness of the urban milieu.

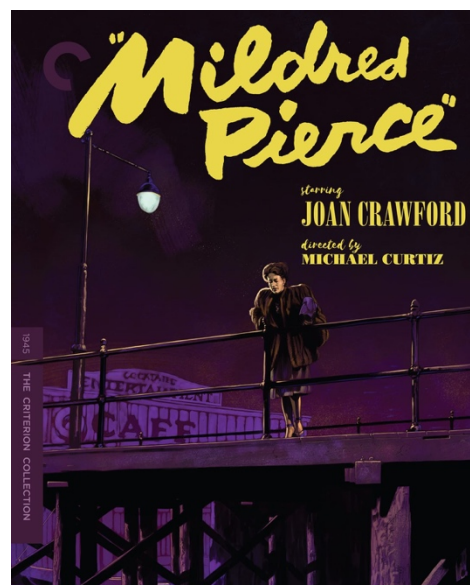


Figure 13. "Mildred Pierce." *The Criterion Collection*, 2017, <https://www.criterion.com/films/29025-mildred-pierce>.

In a Lonely Place (1950)

After canonizing himself with more conventional film noir detective roles in such films as *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, Humphrey Bogart traded the persona for a more personal (and more Hopper-esque) character in Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely*

Place (1950). Actress and one-time lover Louise Brooks wrote that this Bogart role, Dixon Steele, “perfectly defined Humphrey’s own isolation among people” as well as his “pride in his art” (Brooks). Like Hopper’s painted figures, this Bogart character derives his power more from the threat of violence than from overt aggressiveness (although he has that too).

The “lonely place” indicated in this film’s title may refer to several metaphorical realms, but the landscape it best describes is the very mind of the artist. When *In a Lonely Place* opens, Hollywood screenwriter Dixon Steele has not had a hit for about a decade, “since before the war.” When he receives the next novel he is to adapt, he calls it “trash” and invites club hat check girl Mildred to his house to relay the book’s plot to him. Steele’s undying pride in his work makes him stubbornly resist this adaptation project, which his agent assures him will be a hit. Thus, he resides in a lonely place from the outset. The next day, she is found dead and the police circle Steele as a prime suspect. When he finally embraces his storytelling prowess, Steele again retreats to a zone of solitude as he fully immerses his imagination.



Figure 14. *In a Lonely Place*. Directed by Nicholas Ray, Columbia Pictures, 17 May 1950.

One of the most chilling scenes in the film plays like an x-ray of Hopper’s paintings. Policeman and former army pal Brub Nicolai invites Steele to his home for dinner, and Steele gives his imagined version of how the killing may have happened (Figure 16). He sits alone

on his side of the room, perched on the edge of his chair. He graphically describes the struggle, the strangulation, the lifeless body. Ray’s camera leans in close on Steele’s

seared sick grin, capturing his delight and absorption in the act of creation. Nearly every element of the scene—the tight framing, the harsh lighting on Steele’s face, Steele’s passion—heighten Hopper’s style. Brub’s living room could have been a setting for a Hopper piece, but the painter never depicted such an emotionally explicit image. *In a Lonely Place* takes Hopper’s demure, introspective characters and reveals what personal, bubbling passion they withhold.

In the way that Bogart was drawn to his character in *In a Lonely Place*, Dix Steele might also be a stand-in for Edward Hopper himself. Indeed, Hopper painted instead of writing screenplays, but the men share a simultaneous respect and frustration for their respective crafts. Dix recalls the lonesome artist in Hopper’s painting *Office in a Small City* (1953) (Figure 17). In this work, which Hopper unveiled about three years after the release of *In a Lonely Place*, a carefully coiffed man sits alone in his office. It is unclear to what profession he belongs, but the blank white expanse before him on his desk could suggest that he is a painter or a writer. Regardless of his



Figure 15. Hopper, Edward. *Office in a Small City*. 1953, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/488730>.

trade, the man gazes out over a cityscape in broad daylight, a glaze of melancholy on his visage. Now playing on his film screen window: a world that moves so quickly that it does not care for his work nor his lack of work. At the same time, another window frames (films) the man to heighten his sense of self-imposed pressure and isolation.

Similar to how Steele's cold streak as a writer has lasted years, Hopper admitted in 1963 that he was bothered "like hell" that he hadn't yet painted that year (*Edward Hopper* 555). Like this figure in *Office in a Small City*, Hopper and Steele have found themselves ensnared in bouts of artist's block. One of Steele's lines in the film at once encapsulates the fleeting nature of love and inspiration, as well as the fatalism of film noir and life: "I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me." For an creator or a lover, there can be no lonelier place than that space between the moments—or kisses—of passion.

Sweet Smell of Success (1957)

In Alexander Mackendrick's *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), New York City vibrates with the verve of a nocturnal fluorescent swarmed with mosquitoes. The streetlamps and high-rise windows maintain a constant phosphoric glow, as if leeching energy from the city's restless inhabitants. Even though *Sweet Smell of Success* was released in the middle of the twentieth century, it captures the fresh frenzy of the city seen in the early years of the century. But this tale of buzzing urbanites and blood-sucking journalists doesn't only feature the metallic streets of New York's afterhours activities; it also takes time to zoom in on the inky black behind the closed doors of this landscape. In this sense, this film represents a unique visual culmination of Hopper's vision of urban nightlife.

Mackendrick's film does not flinch in its hydraulic drilling of the city. Portrayed by Tony Curtis, main character Sidney Falco is a hungry press agent who will perform seemingly any task to publicize his clients in newspapers. The most powerful columnist

in New York, Burt Lancaster's J.J. Hensecker, refuses to lend him space in his column until Falco completes a series of errant errands. Falco's latest mission: break up the relationship between J.J.'s treasured sister Susie and jazz guitarist Steve Dallas. In order to print J.J.'s piece framing Dallas as a marijuana user and a Communist, Falco launches one of the most morally repugnant sequences in the film: he essentially prostitutes to his friend Rita, a struggling bar cigarette girl, to columnist Otis Elwell (Figure 19). The image of the three figures positioned in Falco's seedy office recalls Hopper works such as *Hotel Lobby* (Figure 18), wherein an older man (who happens to have share a likeness with Otis) stands before a woman who appears to recoil from his gaze. Behind them, as in *Sweet Smell of Success*, waits a darkened room armed with alcohol. Neither the painting nor the film noir depict the encounter behind the door, but the film takes the situation a step further than Hopper does, confirming with dialogue what sexual abhorrence will ensue.

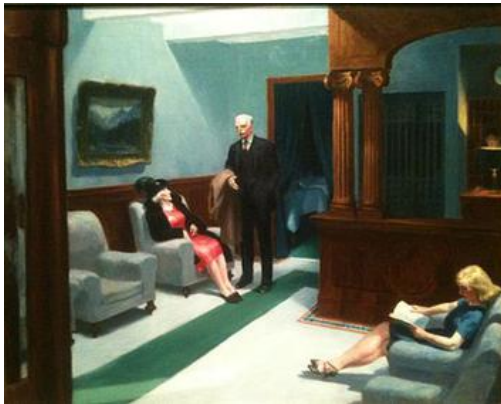


Figure 18. Hopper, Edward. *Hotel Lobby*. 1943, Indianapolis Museum of Art. *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel_Lobby.



Figure 19. *Sweet Smell of Success*. Directed by Alexander Mackendrick, United Artists, 27 Jun 1957.

Like *Mildred Pierce* and *In a Lonely Place*, *Sweet Smell of Success* unfolds a vision of success in the modern urban environment—or what passes for success. The very title of this film indicates as much. However, the film's title grows blacker and more ironic as the runtime passes. In the end, *Sweet Smell of Success* presents the downfall of the successful modern man in J.J. Hunsecker. Next to Orson Welles' Charles Foster Kane, J.J. Hunsecker emerges as one of the ultimate examples of this lonely fallen giant—an upper-class version of the film noir villain. Unlike many of his malevolent counterparts in more conventional films noir, Hunsecker walks out of the film unscratched physically. Instead, he suffers a more human injury, one that Hopper would be more likely to imbue into one of his paintings: J.J. loses the only other person he cares for in the world, his sister. Hunsecker becomes in the final moments one of Hopper's silent, ruminating characters. Although we can never truly know what courses through the distraught minds of Hopper's *Nighthawks* or the lone woman in the *Automat*, we might be able to make an educated guess by studying Hunsecker's plight.

Grainy yet sumptuous, the cinematography by James Wong Howe captures the depraved allure of the city. In his review for *The TV Guide*, James Monaco marvels at this film noir's visual style, noting that cinematographer James Wong Howe's night-for-night shooting "turns a Broadway juice bar into a cross between a Weegee photo and an Edward Hopper canvas." Throughout the film, characters sit huddled in booths with light cascading onto their heads like in Hopper's *Nighthawks*. Two scenes featuring Hunsecker crystallize his alienation. The first, in which the news mogul gazes out over his high-rise apartment balcony into the teeming guts of New York (Figure 20). His head turned away from us, Hunsecker feels in this moment that he can control the city's radioactive glow with his journalist influence. In the film's final moments, he finds

himself alone in his apartment again as he reels from losing his sister to Steve (Figure 21). This time, Hunsecker finally feels the loneliness of the city the way that Hopper observed it.



Figure 16. Sweet Smell of Success. Directed by Alexander Mackendrick, United Artists, 27 Jun 1957.



Figure 17. Sweet Smell of Success. Directed by Alexander Mackendrick, United Artists, 27 Jun 1957.

CONCLUSION

Edward Hopper did not invent loneliness. He didn't even create the specific type of loneliness that he depicts in so many of his paintings: the sense of isolation brought about by cities in early to mid-twentieth century America. He simply did what all great artists do. He observed the world around him, extracted his own significance, and set it to art so that audiences might learn from his point of view. He saw a world in which humans had created their own cages. Not only had they created their own confinement; they seemed to stop at nothing in order to advance their solitude. Of course, the pioneers who revolutionized the facets of twentieth century American life did not intend to further propagate alienation, but they unwittingly succeeded with amazing precision.

Hopper's paintings might even be arranged to form a single narrative that illustrates the inescapability of urban loneliness. The lonely woman begins her night at home, dressing herself as an involuntary act in a peep show before her *Night Windows*. After dressing, she ventures out into the cold dark to find warm sustenance in an *Automat*. She eats alone and gazes into her coffee, wondering where life has gone wrong. She wonders how she might find a brief reprieve from her alienation. *Of course*, she thinks, *I can go to the pictures*. She goes to a *New York Movie* house, but finds no solace in the monochromatic pictures projected there. Instead, she finds a lonely wall away from the screen, accompanied by the soft artificial light of a sconce. Gazing again at the floor, she decides to take an extravagant trip to assuage her isolation. On the train in *Compartment C Car*, she seems to find a moment of peace among the lurid ink of a periodical. She does not immediately realize that her extra dollars have bought her a deluxe space in which to be further isolated. The manmade, alien green metal surrounds

her all the way to her destination and back home. She has nowhere left to turn. She decides to douse her loneliness with a persuasive substance alongside a few strangers at Phillies. She doesn't speak. She observes the fluorescent cicada buzz, the limitless darkness outside the window. The environment and inventions of the twentieth century have failed her, making her more lonely than she was before. She is one of the *Nighthawks*.

Film noir heightens this dark side of Hopper's work. The genre could be considered a cousin to Hopper's paintings. It raises and illuminates the spaces that Hopper purposefully leaves empty. In a sense, film noir encourages cynical readings of his paintings by drawing upon Hopper's visual style and making explicit the tensions—sexual, violent, and otherwise—beneath the surface. The main characters of films noir, like *Swede*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Dixon Steele*, and *J.J. Hunsecker*, enter into Hopper's world of urban loneliness and emerge more broken than before. In film noir, there is little hope for anyone, including prizefighters who run astray of criminals, mothers desperate for their child's love, screenwriters with volcanic temperaments, or journalist moguls. In one way or another, they all pay for simply being themselves.

Hopper's paintings share visual and thematic cues with films noir, but they leave their situation's outcomes for the viewer to decide. Hopper does not depict blood or sex. He does not take aim at skyscrapers, but at empty rooms. Hopper focuses on the moments between the moments, the moments in which his characters' thoughts flutter the most wildly. He uses windows to suggest film screens not only to draw our attention to the loneliness of the characters in the context of the time period, but to coax us into viewing our own loneliness.

When we consume a painting or a film, we are lonely. There is no other way to truly absorb such a work. With his images of isolated people, Hopper reminds us of that loneliness in the moment that we view his work. He reminds us that we have to grapple with the loneliness that the cities of early to mid-twentieth century America have thrust upon us. But Hopper's loneliness does not have to signify despair. In portraying the calm, the quiet moments, he also reminds us that there is a peace, an unknowability in loneliness. In the moments that we are alone, we finally have the time to consider what has come before and what will happen next. Just like the *Nighthawks*, we all crowd the diner that is the world, sitting close but not speaking. Just like how we cannot know where the man's gaze in *Nighthawks* lies, we cannot know what will happen next. His wife, Jo Hopper, once explained how quiet and isolated he appeared: "Sometimes talking with Eddie is just like dropping a stone in a well except that it doesn't thump when it hits the bottom" (qtd. in Levin, *Intimate*). However, if we spoke all the time, then we might end up like the tragic Dixon Steele or J.J. Hunsecker. With his portraits of loneliness, Hopper encourages us to exercise our minds, to imagine what has led to this point and what is to come, both in his paintings and in our own lives. He asks us to embrace and explore the unknowability.

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